

News Release
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WSEM

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WSEM CHALLENGES NORTHEAST OHIO COMPANIES TO RAISE HUNGER AWARENESS THIS THANKSGIVING

CLEVELAND (November 17, 2008) — This Thanksgiving, the West Side Ecumenical Ministry (WSEM) is issuing a challenge to Northeast Ohio companies to make a difference in the lives of Clevelanders in need through its inaugural *WSEM 21 Challenge*, November 17-23.

The *WSEM 21 Challenge* is a 7-day commitment, in which participants agree to live on the average \$1 per meal, \$3 per day, \$21 per week food stamp allocation to raise awareness about hunger and generate critically needed funds to help feed hungry children and adults in the community. The challenge is the creation of the WSEM volunteer Junior Advisory Board, a group of young professionals who already began the Challenge themselves.

“We wanted to raise awareness about hunger in Northeast Ohio by giving up something we take for granted – the ability to go to a grocery store and purchase any foods we want,” said Ann Netzel, chair of WSEM’s Junior Advisory Board and an associate with Jones Day’s Cleveland office. “We thought what better way to raise awareness than to experience what thousands of individuals living on food stamps have to face where difficult choices must be made daily about how to feed your family on a limited budget.”

WSEM hopes to test the Challenge this year through the participation of a select group of Northeast Ohio companies and organizations like Charter One Bank who has agreed to sponsor the Challenge. Other organizations whose employees are participating in the Challenge include: City of Cleveland Law

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Department, Jones Day, HumanArc, Great Lakes Brewing Company, Hands on Northeast Ohio, Newry Corp., Blue Point Capital Partners, Hathaway Brown, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and Miami University. If successful, WSEM hopes to expand the Challenge to additional organizations in 2009.

To participate, Northeast Ohio organizations commit to recruiting 21 employees that will sign a “contract” pledging to spend no more than \$21 for the duration of the Challenge. Each of the 21 Challengers are then asked to recruit 21 Sponsors that are each asked to commit \$21, thus raising \$441 each or \$9,261 in total.

However, WSEM welcomes any level of participation with the Challenge, and participants are encouraged to sign up as individuals.

Every dollar raised through the Challenge will be used by the three WSEM Food Centers (Brookside, Community Corner and Near West) to supplement the food pantry with nutritious fresh food items and link WSEM’s clients to critical outreach services to help lead them down the path to self-sufficiency.

Those participating in the Challenge can blog about their experiences at *WSEM’s 21 Challenge* blog at <http://wsem21challenge.blogspot.com/>. And they will have plenty to blog about considering the high cost of food and that participants are not allowed to accept free food from family, friends or co-workers.

“It’s more difficult than I even realized,” said Netzel who recently blogged about her grocery shopping experience.

Netzel is the first to admit that living on a food stamp budget for just one week cannot come close to the struggles encountered by low-income families.

“It’s still an eye opening experience that you will not forget,” she said.

For more information on how to participate, call WSEM at 216.651.2037 or go to www.wsem.org.

About WSEM

Founded in 1966, West Side Ecumenical Ministry (WSEM) is a nonprofit, social service organization working to assist families and individuals meet their needs through programs of service. WSEM administers programs through its three Centers of Excellence and Counseling Solutions Program that provide food and outreach services, employment training, early childhood education and counseling solutions. For more information, visit www.wsem.org.

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